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Synthese special issue on Truth and Epistemic Norms

Introduction

Julien Dutant, Davide Fassio and Anne Meylan¹

On his 60th birthday Pascal Engel was presented with a collection of more than fifty papers authored by prestigious philosophers that reflected his long career of promotion and development of analytic philosophy in and out of Europe.² This special issue brings together a selection of those papers centred around the topics of truth and epistemic norms, along with Pascal Engel's replies.

Normative questions in epistemology have been a longstanding focus of Pascal Engel's research (see e.g. Engel 1991, Engel and Rorty 2007). A central question has been whether and in what sense truth is a norm for belief (Engel 2005, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). A parallel question arises for assertion and inquiry (Engel 2008). Three of the collection's papers deal with these issues. In "Engel vs. Rorty on Truth", **Erick Olsson**'s focuses on whether rational inquiry aims at truth. The article critically assesses the debate opposing Engel and Rorty in their co-authored book "What's the Use of Truth?". Olsson sides with Engel in maintaining that truth plays a distinct conceptual role in our intellectual lives. Drawing on a general theory of rational goal-setting which has its roots in management science, he argues that Rorty's central claim that truth is not something we should aim for over and beyond justification rests on a principle of goal-setting rationality that is generally invalid. Olsson concludes by stressing that the goal of truth is likely to have the positive effect of increasing motivation and effort in inquiry, and that this may offset the drawbacks that Rorty calls attention to. In "Engel on Doxastic Correctness", **Conor McHugh** raises two worries for Pascal Engel's views on the norms for belief. The first concerns Engel's distinction between two types of correctness: i-correctness and e-correctness. According to Engel, a belief is e-correct if and only if it is true, and it is i-incorrect when it is held for bad reasons, on the basis of insufficient evidence. Together, these two types of correctness constitute an overarching correctness properly possessed by beliefs. McHugh challenges the idea that beliefs' i-correctness is a genuine kind of doxastic correctness. Amongst other things, he observes that a belief is deemed to be correct even when it is not i-correct, that it seems odd to think of appropriate basing as a form of correctness at all, and that i-correctness and e-correctness are not reciprocally independent properties. The second worry concerns Engel's view about the specific type of normativity involved in doxastic correctness. According to Engel, doxastic correctness should not be interpreted as a deontic notion (such as a permission or a duty) but as an ideal of reason, belonging to the category of the ought-to-be rather than that of the ought-to-do. McHugh challenges Engel's view by arguing that i) the failure to attain true belief need not be a failure of reason (viz. an instance of irrationality), ii) achieving ideals is normally supererogatory and failure to achieve them is not associated with serious criticism and blame in the way false beliefs are, iii) aiming for ideals is something that can be met with graded success but having correct beliefs is a categorical, non-graded matter. McHugh concludes by exploring an alternative approach to the nature of correctness normativity. He suggests that correctness is a normative property in its own right, neither deontic nor evaluative, related to the notion of fittingness (see further McHugh 2014). In "Engel on Knowledge and Assertion", **Adam Carter** argues against both the assumption that knowledge is the only norm of assertion (the so-called "uniqueness hypothesis") and against the view that knowledge constitutes a sufficient credential for assertion. Building on Lackey's (2008) Doctor Case, Carter presents another widespread range of cases in which knowledge would not make the assertion appropriate. Cases of "epistemic hypocrisy" —as Carter calls them— are cases in which the target assertion is criticisable. What would make the epistemically hypocritical assertion appropriate is that one had better epistemic support than one does when one asserts.

One point of entry into the question of what epistemic norms govern belief is to ask what are the epistemic goods, that is, what is of epistemic value. Two central issues in this are whether knowledge has more value than true belief and whether the value of either is derived from their contribution to successful action. In "Engel on Pragmatic Encroachment and Epistemic Value", **Duncan Pritchard** takes up Engel's view on the latter (Engel 2009). While Pritchard agrees with Engel's rejection of the idea that knowledge is sensitive to pragmatic factors, he criticizes Engel's way of relating the pragmatic encroachment to the issues that regard epistemic value. According to Engel, once we grant that there is no such phenomenon as pragmatic encroachment on knowledge, then it follows that the kind of pragmatic factors appealed to by proponents of this view cannot confer any value on knowledge. Pritchard argues that this latter claim is mistaken: the kind of pragmatic factors

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² Dutant, J., Fassio D. and Meylan A. (eds.) *Liber Amicorum Pascal Engel*, University of Geneva, <http://www.unige.ch/lettres/philo/publications/engel/liberamicorum>.

appealed to by proponents of pragmatic encroachment could potentially have a role to play in determining the value of knowledge without this having any bearing on whether the pragmatic encroachment applies or not. According to Pritchard, Engel's mistake is to be located in the failure to observe an ambiguity between an attributive and a predicative interpretation of the notion of epistemic value. We can maintain that pragmatic factors add value to knowledge without having to accept pragmatic encroachment as long as we make it clear that we are talking of epistemic value in its predicative sense (the value of the epistemic as opposed to a distinctively epistemic kind of value). Thus, Pritchard argues, it is possible to reject pragmatic encroachment on knowledge while holding that pragmatic factors explain the value of knowledge. In "Commodious Knowledge", **Christopher Kelp and Mona Simion** put forward a new account of the value of knowledge that builds on the idea that knowledge is useful for action. Knowledge, they argue, is like water in that it is a widely and readily available commodity. Like mere true beliefs or Gettierized true beliefs, knowledge is instrumentally good in virtue of involving a correct representation of the world. However, they argue, knowledge is superior because of its commodity: like water, it is readily and widely available. According to them, the superior value of knowledge lies precisely in its being a way of correctly representing the world that is much more readily available than alternative epistemic goods.

The foregoing debates concern the analogue of 'metaethics' in epistemology and only tangentially touch upon the 'first-order' and perhaps more pressing question of what, specifically, we should believe. On ordinary matters, Engel has sympathies with the common sense tradition (Engel 2007). On academic matters, Engel has forcefully defended a rationalist ideal against various intellectual trends that "betray" it – to put it in the words of Julien Benda, whose legacy Engel has recently highlighted (Engel 2012). In "Common Sense and Skepticism", **Keith Lehrer** spells out his own defense of a common sense answer to skepticism. He first compares the defense of common sense provided by Thomas Reid to that of G.E. Moore against the skepticism of David Hume. The discussion sets the stage for Lehrer's own defense, which relies on an account of ordinary knowledge that combines Hume's notion of sense impressions with Reid's insistence on the trustworthiness of our faculties. In "Tool-Box or Toy-Box? Hard Obscurantism in Economic Modeling?", **Jon Elster** points out that alongside the kind of "soft obscurantist" anti-rationalist trends of academia that Engel denounces, there exists a kind of "hard obscurantism" in the social sciences that abuses the tools of rational inquiry in the "hard" sciences such as quantitative, formal, and mathematical methods. In the writing of some economists and political scientists, Elster claims, such tools lose their explanatory function and become research goals in themselves---"toys". Elster makes his case by criticizing some representative examples.

Two further papers focus on how knowledge relates to true belief and perception, respectively. In "Knowledge as *de re* true belief?", **Paul Egré** discusses Kratzer (2002)'s account of knowledge as a form of *de re* belief of facts and examines how best to articulate the *de re* vs. *de dicto* distinction within this account. He shows that, contrary to Kratzer's view, the distinction does not require postulating a primitive difference between facts and true propositions but can be fully captured in terms of mechanisms of binding and scope. Egré argues that if one adopts this articulation of the distinction, one can use the account to explain the original pair of Gettier cases. However, Egré also recognizes that the account provides at best partial truth conditions for knowledge, for it cannot be generalized to explain Gettier-Goldman cases of causally connected but unreliable belief, as well as other cases similar to Gettier's original ones but in which it is not clear that a *de re* connection to a fact is missing. Egré also suggests that the *de re* belief analysis provides a way to spell out Starmans and Friedman's (2012) distinction between apparent evidence and authentic evidence, which he takes to be the crux of the original Gettier cases. In "Knowledge, perception, and the art of camouflage", **Jérôme Dokic** provides an original challenge to the Epistemic Conception of Perception (ECP) according to which perception either is a form of knowledge (Dretske 1969, Williamson 2000) or puts the subject in a position to gain knowledge about what is perceived (McDowell 1994, 1998). Against this view, Dokic puts forward a particular case in which a perceptual experience has propositional content and is veridical but fails to yield knowledge of the state of affairs presented by the experience. The case involves perceptual hysteresis, an empirically well-studied phenomenon involving the maintenance of a perceptual experience with a relatively stable content over progressively degrading sensory stimulations. In such cases, Dokic argues, the boundary between the experience being veridical and it being non-veridical does not coincide with the boundary between knowledge and ignorance. Dokic concludes by addressing three possible rejoinders by the defenders of ECP.

The nature of truth itself has been one of Engel's main research topics (e.g. Engel 1991). In particular, Engel opposes a "functionalist" account on which truth is characterized by a functional role that is realized by different properties in different domains (Engel 2013b). In "How to Account for the Oddness of Missing-Link Conditionals", **Igor Douven** puts forward a functionalist account of the truth of conditionals. His starting point is the perceived oddity of "missing-link" conditionals, conditionals whose antecedent and consequent lack any apparent connection. On the standard account the phenomenon is a pragmatic one: roughly, the assertion of a conditional generates the implicature that there is an internal connection between antecedent and consequent, and if no such connection exists, the assertion is infelicitous (though not necessarily false).

Douven draws on recent philosophical and psychological work to provide a semantic account instead. The central idea is that the connection between antecedent and consequent is a functional property, which can be realized by a variety of more specific, first-order relations. He focuses in particular on the “inferentialist” account proposed in Douven et al (2014), according to which the truth of a conditional requires the existence of a connector that may be realized by inferential relations of different nature: deductive, inductive or abductive.

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